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Charles L. Alderson

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Number III

## THE DESCENDANTS OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

BY D. O. S. LOWELL





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## THE DESCENDANTS OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

BY D. O. S. LOWELL

A REMARKABLE INSTANCE OF INTELLECTUAL HEREDITY—AN AMERICAN FAMILY WHOSE MEMBERS, FOR SIX GENERATIONS, HAVE BEEN HEADS OF UNIVERSITIES AND LEADERS IN THE EDUCATIONAL WORLD

It has long been admitted that many things, like diseases and proclivities, may be handed down from generation to generation. It is a familiar saying that "the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."

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JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703-1758), THIRD PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY (PRINCETON), AND ONE OF THE FOREMOST AMERICANS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY



But the writer does not remember to have seen in any work on heredity that the tendency to be a college president may run in the blood. That this is a fact, however, the following sketch goes far to prove, or else we have a set of unexampled coincidences.

the Amazon, mingling with many tributaries and ever broadening toward the sea.

In some strange way, moreover, the spirit of Edwards seems incapable of dissolution in all these generations of commingled blood. It is held in solu-



AARON BURR (1756-1836). VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.  
GRANDSON OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

Jonathan Edwards was one of the foremost Americans of the eighteenth century. In intellectual eminence, only Benjamin Franklin can be compared with him. These two great men far excelled their fellows, the one by his marvelous common sense, the other by his uncommon mental acumen. But in one respect they differed widely. Franklin was like the Nile, a river majestic yet solitary; while the stream of Edwards' descendants flowed on like

tion, rather, and throbs in the arteries of his most remote posterity. He was president of Princeton for only a few brief weeks before his death, but in the five generations that have since had their entrances and their exits upon the stage of action, a college president has never yet been lacking among his direct descendants. More than this, many direct descendants who were disqualified because of the accident of sex have made college presidents of their husbands.





JONATHAN EDWARDS, JR. (1745-1801), PRESIDENT OF UNION COLLEGE, SON OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

*From the portrait by Moulthrop*

But the presidential family of President Edwards is not confined to colleges or universities. As members of this astonishing group, we find, it is true, presidents of ten colleges and universities—of Amherst, Hamilton, Rutgers, Union, Princeton (two), Yale (three), Johns Hopkins, Columbia, Carnegie Institution, and the University of California. Besides these, there are founders and presidents of two law-schools, two presidents of a theological seminary, one of the Association of American Anatomists, one of the Boston Society of Natural History, a bank president, and a president of three railroads; and finally one Vice-President and one President of the United States. Here are letters, law, medicine, theology, science, commerce, finance, politics, and statesmanship, all officered—and head-officered, too—by the sons and sons-in-law of Jonathan Edwards.

#### THE FIRST GENERATION

"The most eminent graduate of the college [Yale], the greatest theologian of his century, the ablest metaphysician of the period between Leibnitz and Kant"—these are the words with

which Franklin Bowditch Dexter, in "Yale Biographies," begins his brief sketch of President Edwards.

The pioneer of the family of which Jonathan was the most illustrious member was William Edwards, a young Welshman who in 1610 came with his mother and his stepfather to Hartford, Connecticut. William married Agnes Spencer, and had one son, Richard, born in 1647. By his first wife, Elizabeth Tuttle, Richard had six children; of these the eldest son, Timothy, born in 1669, was the father of Jonathan. Timothy graduated from Harvard at the age of twenty-two, receiving the degrees of A. B. and A. M. on the same day—"an uncommon mark of respect." He married Esther, daughter of the Rev. Solomon Stoddard, by whom he had eleven children.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was the fifth child and only son of Timothy and Esther. His "sixty feet of sisters"—for the Edwardses were a tall family—were Esther, Elizabeth, Anne, Mary—his seniors—and Eunice, Abigail, Jerusha, Hannah, Lucy, and Martha. Jonathan gave early evidence of being a scholar and a thinker. He entered Yale at thirteen and received his A. M.



SERENO EDWARDS DWIGHT (1780-1850), PRESIDENT OF HAMILTON COLLEGE, GREAT-GRANDSON OF JONATHAN EDWARDS



when he was twenty. Seven years later he married Sarah Pierpont, a seventeen-year-old girl described as of striking beauty and intelligence, whose father was one of the founders of Yale. "A

ton, Massachusetts. At the end of that time he was persecuted for righteousness' sake and dismissed. He was thus left, at the age of forty-seven, with a family of eight children at home and no income



TIMOTHY DWIGHT (1752-1817), EIGHTH PRESIDENT OF YALE, GRANDSON OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

*From the portrait by Frostbull*

sweeter couple I have not seen." George Whitfield wrote of them in his diary. They had the following children: Sarah, Jerusha, Esther, Mary, Lucy, Timothy, Susannah, Eunice, Jonathan, Jr., Elizabeth, and Pierpont. Of the eleven, seven were born on Sunday.

For twenty-four years Mr. Edwards was settled over a church in Northamp-

"His prospects were apparently ruined," his biographer remarks; "but in fact the period of his greatest activity, in which he laid the foundations of his enduring fame, was thus ushered in." He went to Stockbridge, Massachusetts; then a wilderness, and became a missionary to the Indians; and in that solitude, in his moments of leisure, he wrote his immor-





tal treatise on "The Freedom of the Will."

In 1757, on the death of his son-in-law, the Rev. Aaron Burr, he was called to be the third president of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton; but shortly after taking up his duties there he died of smallpox. He was buried in Princeton, and upon his tomb is a Latin epitaph extolling his virtues and pronouncing him "second to none in wisdom, discriminating judgment, and mental caliber."

To the commanding intellect of Jonathan Edwards both Europe and America have borne witness. "That he is the first metaphysician this country has produced, no one can doubt," said Mark Hopkins. "He was one of the wonders of the world," declared John Fiske; "probably the greatest intelligence that the Western Hemisphere has yet seen." "Of all the scholars and philosophers that America had produced from the beginning of the [eighteenth] century," wrote Bancroft, "only two had established a considerable and permanent reputation—Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards." Finally, Dr. Richard Storrs, the silver-tongued, says eloquently: "He held New England, as no man else, to heights of thought difficult to scale; his service was one which no generation will outlive to the end of our history."

Edwards was fortunate indeed. Not only do his works follow him, but a noble posterity still keeps his name in undying remembrance, as we shall see.

#### THE SECOND GENERATION

Jonathan Edwards, Jr. (1745-1801), second president of Union College, was the second son and ninth child of President Edwards, and was graduated from Princeton in 1765. The coincidences in the life of father and son were many and striking. "The name, education, and early employments of both were alike. Both were religious in their youth, were distinguished scholars, and were tutors for equal periods in the colleges where they were educated. Both were settled in the ministry as successors to their maternal grandfathers; were dismissed on account of their religious opinions; and were again settled in re-



THEODOREDWIGHT WOOLSEY (1801-1880), NINTH PRESIDENT OF YALE, GREAT GRANDSON OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

tired country towns, over congregations singularly attached to them, where they had leisure to prepare and publish their valuable works. Both left these studies to become presidents of colleges; and both died shortly after inauguration, one at fifty six and the other at fifty seven, each having preached on the first Sabbath of the year of his death on the text: 'This year thou shalt die.'"

The Rev. Aaron Burr (1716-1757), second president of Princeton, married Esther, third daughter of President Edwards. Burr was only thirteen years younger than his father-in-law. He graduated at Yale in 1735, and was elected president of the college of New Jersey in 1748. He moved the college from Elizabeth to Newark, and finally to Princeton. He increased the number of students from eight to eighty, and "his aptness to teach was almost without parallel."

President Burr first saw his wife when she was fifteen. He did not meet her again for six years, and then was with her at Stockbridge for only three days. He went back to Princeton, but two weeks later sent an undergraduate to bring Esther and her mother. They arrived on Saturday, May 27, 1752, and





THEODORE WILLIAM DWIGHT (1822-1892), WARDEN OF THE COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL,  
GREAT-GREAT-GRANDSON OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

*From the portrait by Daniel Huntington*

on the following Monday there was a wedding at the president's house.

Contemporaries said of Mr. Burr that he was "modest in prosperity, prudent in difficulty, indefatigable in business, magnanimous in danger, easy in manner, of exquisite judgment, of profound learning, catholic in sentiment, of the purest morals, and great even in the minutest things."

#### THE THIRD GENERATION

President Burr's son, Aaron Burr (1756-1836), was left a double orphan at the age of two, and was brought up by his uncle, Timothy Edwards himself

scarcely more than a youth. Aaron was a wilful child, but fond of study and quick to learn. At eleven he was ready for Princeton, but had to wait two years because of his age. During the Revolutionary War he entered the army as a private, and rose to be a lieutenant-colonel. After the war he became a prominent lawyer in New York, was elected to the United States Senate, and in 1800 was a leading candidate for the Presidency. The electoral vote resulted in a tie between Burr and Jefferson, and the House of Representatives, after thirty-six ballots, chose the Virginian President and Burr Vice President.

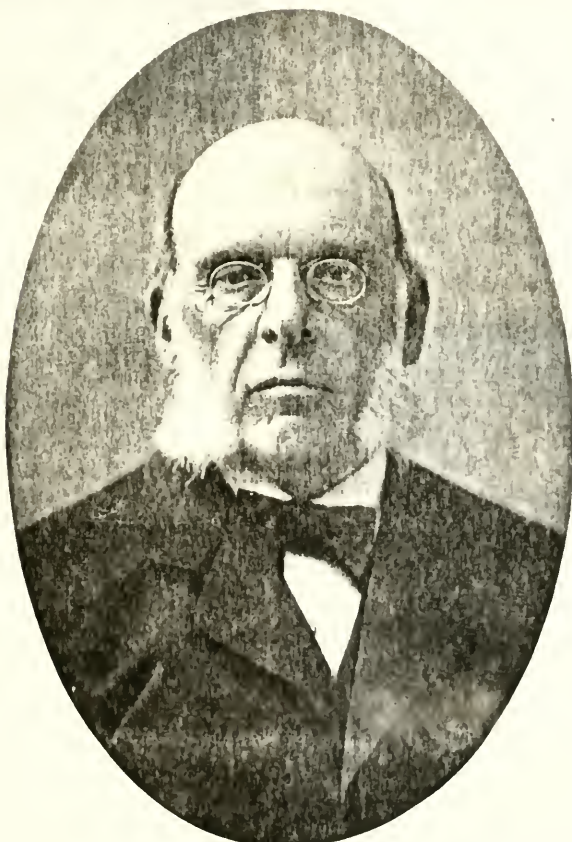


Before his term expired, Burr killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. After that his fortunes declined. In 1807 he was tried for treason, and though acquitted he has been under suspicion even to this day. That he had brilliant parts and a commanding intellect, no one can question, and in recent years defenders have arisen to plead in his behalf; but though he may not have been as black as he was painted, the verdict of history should not lightly be set aside. He has been called the one "black sheep" of the Edwards descendants.

After Aaron Burr, the most famous of the grandsons of Jonathan Edwards

was Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), eighth president of Yale, and one of the great holders of that office. His mother, Mary Edwards, was only eighteen years his senior. She had thirteen children, and her descendants, as will be seen, have done more to uphold the intellectual prestige of the Edwards lineage than any other branch of the family.

Timothy Dwight was a juvenile prodigy. At six, he wished to learn Latin, but his father disapproved; so while the other boys were at play, he used to borrow a Latin grammar and study secretly. He might have been ready for Yale at eight, had there been

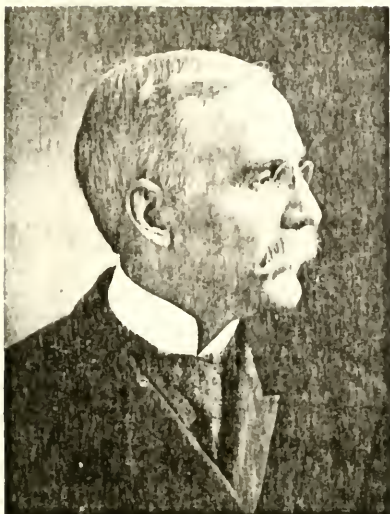


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TIMOTHY DWIGHT (BORN 1828), TWELFTH PRESIDENT OF YALE,  
GREAT-GREAT-GRANDSON OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

*From a Photograph, U. P. L. N. Y. 1866*





MERRILL EDWARDS GATES (BORN 1848), FORMERLY PRESIDENT OF AMHERST, GREAT-GREAT-GRANDSON OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

*From a photograph by C. Goodrich, Washington*

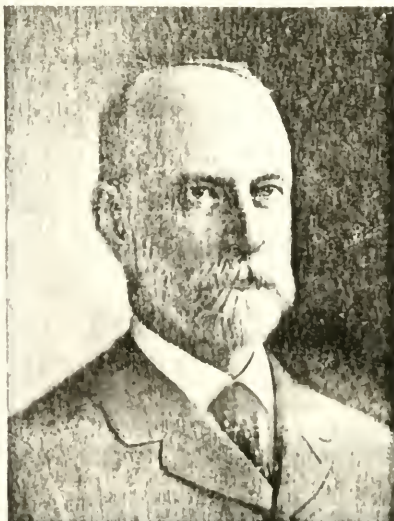
any hope of entering at that tender age. He delayed until he was fourteen, though by that time he had done most of the work of the Freshman and Sophomore years. It was the custom in winter to have chapel exercises at half-past five, but young Timothy rose before that hour to read Homer by candlelight. This reckless overwork injured his sight, and an attack of smallpox made the damage irreparable. During all his life he had to rely on friends and amanuenses for his reading and writing.

In 1795 he was chosen president of Yale, which then had but one hundred and ten students. He raised this number to three hundred and thirteen. He acted not only as president, but as professor of divinity, rhetoric, logic, metaphysics, and ethics. He died in the full tide of his powers, the victim of a disease similar to that which recently deprived us of President Harper. Though he suffered severely during the last months of his life, he continued to work until within four days of his death. "President Dwight is ever present to my mind as the great model teacher," said one of his pupils.

Fanning Reeve (1744-1823), founder and first president of the Litchfield (Connecticut) Law School, was not a descendant of Jonathan Edwards, but belonged to the family by marriage. His wife, whom he married in 1772, was a daughter of the first Aaron Burr, and a sister of Vice-President Burr. His law school was the earliest institution of its kind in the United States, and for a long time the only one; and many famous men were among his pupils. Dr. Lyman Beecher said of him and of Timothy Dwight: "President Dwight by his talents and official labors exerted a powerful national influence through his pupils; and next to his, if not equally so, has been the national influence of Judge Reeve. Few men have had a life in which there is less to be deplored and more to be admired."

#### THE FOURTH GENERATION

Of the sons of Timothy Dwight the most distinguished was Sereno Edwards Dwight (1786-1859), third president of Hamilton College. Graduating at Yale in 1803, he studied law, but abandoning that for the ministry, became the second pastor of Park Street Church, Boston.



CHARLES SUMNER MINOT OF THE HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL, GREAT-GREAT-GRANDSON OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

*From a photograph by F. Perkins, Boston*





college presidents, belong by marriage to this fifth generation of the house of Edwards. One is Nicholas Murray Butler, the young and progressive head of Columbia University. Before reaching his present position—to which he was elected in 1902, in succession to Seth Low—Dr. Butler was president of the Teachers' College in New York and of the National Educational Association. His wife, who died in 1903, was Susanna Edwards Schuyler, whose mother, Susannah Edwards, granddaughter of Jonathan Edwards' son Timothy, married Jacob Rutsen Schuyler.

Daniel Coit Gilman, one of the best known American educators of the day, married Elizabeth Dwight Woolsey, daughter of John M. Woolsey, niece of Theodore Dwight Woolsey, and great-great-granddaughter of Jonathan Edwards. Dr. Gilman has been president of three great universities—the University of California, Johns Hopkins (for more than a quarter of a century), and the Carnegie Institution. He was invited to be the first president of each of these, and was the first head of the last two. He has also been president of the American Oriental Society and of the National Civil Service Reform League.

Last to be mentioned in this fifth generation is Egbert Coffin Smyth (1829-1901), who succeeded Dr. Edwards Park as president of the Andover Theological Seminary. President Park opposed Dr. Smyth's election, thinking him too conservative; yet shortly after he was brought to trial for heresy, though the charges were not sustained. In 1892 a writer in the *Christian Union* (now the *Outlook*) declared that the three greatest names in the history of Andover were Park, Phelps, and Smyth. "The first was the incomparable theological instructor; the second, the man of the spirit; the third, almost peerless in his knowledge of the history of the church and his ability to impart it to others." President Park's wife was Elizabeth Bradford Dwight, granddaughter of the first Timothy Dwight of Yale.

#### THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH GENERATIONS

In the sixth and seventh generations of the family we find, among Jonathan Edwards' direct descendants, the names of

one college president, Dr. Merrill E. Gates; one prominent professor and scientist, Dr. Charles Sedgwick Minot; and a successful author, Winston Churchill. And if we include those who have married into the house of Edwards, we reach the culmination of the presidential strain in the present chief magistrate of the United States; for a granddaughter of General Daniel Tyler is the wife of Theodore Roosevelt.

Charles Sedgwick Minot descends from Timothy Edwards, son of the great Jonathan, by another line, which again combines the names of Edwards and Dwight. Timothy's daughter Rhoda married Josiah Dwight; their daughter, Elizabeth Buckminster Dwight, became the wife of Charles Sedgwick; and their daughter was the mother of Charles Sedgwick Minot. Dr. Minot a leading professor at the Harvard Medical School and a recognized authority in biology and embryology, has been president of the following learned societies—the Association of American Anatomists, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Massachusetts Zoological Society, and the Boston Society of Natural History.

Finally, in no descendant of President Edwards does the presidential blood seem to run more strongly than in Merrill Edwards Gates, whose mother, Fanny Jennette Parsons, was the great granddaughter of Sarah, eldest daughter of Jonathan Edwards. Born in 1818 and graduated from the University of Rochester in 1870, twelve years later he was appointed president of Rutgers. After eight years at Rutgers, he was elected to the headship of Amherst and of Oberlin in the same week. He accepted the former post, which he held for nine years. He has been formally chosen president, or has received an official offer of the position, in five State universities or colleges besides those mentioned. He also acted for six years as president of the American Missionary Association, and for ten as chairman of the United States board of Indian commissioners.

It is not likely that the record of this remarkable family will close here. No doubt, as time goes on, there will be other distinguished names to add to the roll of Jonathan Edwards' descendants.













